

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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CHIPPENDALE MIRROR  
in John Brown House  
[see inside front cover]

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*ISSUED QUARTERLY AT PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND*

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## CHIPPENDALE MIRROR

[reproduced on front cover]

*On the cover is reproduced a beautifully carved pine mirror overlaid with gold leaf. It is a Chippendale type looking glass in an excellent state of preservation for one made in the 1750-1760 period.*

*The mirror was an heirloom of the late John O. Ames, a descendant of the Dorr and Ames families of Rhode Island. It was recently presented to the Society by Mrs. John O. Ames of Sharon, Vermont.*

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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## FIRST RHODE ISLANDER IN TASMANIA

by THOMAS DUNBABIN\*

ARNOLD FISK, a judge's son from Johnston, R. I., first entered Australian history in June, 1804, when he shipped at Tahiti on the brig *Harrington*, bound from Sydney, Australia, to the coast of Chile. How he came to be at Tahiti is not clear.

He probably reached the Pacific on one of the many Rhode Island vessels which then sailed to China by way of Australia. In the 11 years from 1792 to 1803 fifteen Rhode Island vessels had visited New South Wales. Others; for example, the *Ann and Hope* in 1799, rounded Tasmania and passed up through the western Pacific without stopping at any Australian port.

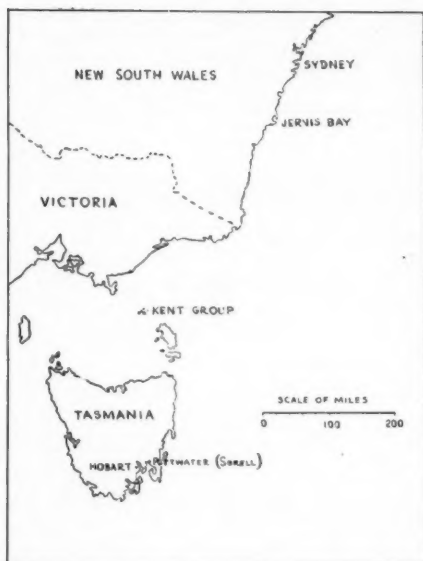
The *Harrington* was a 180-ton Calcutta-built vessel carrying normally six guns and thirty-five men, owned by Chase, Chinnery, and Co., of Madras and commanded by William Campbell. She had visited the coasts of Chile and Peru on a smuggling expedition in 1803-1804 when the Spaniards had seized one of her boats and arrested 13 men.<sup>1</sup>

On this second voyage Campbell had a letter of marque from the Presidency of Madras against France and Holland, then at war with Britain. He had stated in Sydney that he intended to seek sealskins on Mas-afuera (the outer island of Juan Fernandez about 350 miles west of Chile) and also, if he learned there that war between Britain and Spain had broken out, to cruise as a privateer against Spanish ships and commerce. Campbell stated later that Governor King of New South Wales had expressed the hope that the *Harrington* would "bring in a Valuable Prize as the Colony was very poor."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Historical Records of Australia (H.R.A.) ser. 1, v. 4, p. 148 and 251.

<sup>2</sup>H.R.A., v. 5, pp. 343 *et seq.*



When he sailed from Sydney on May 1, 1804, Campbell had raised the strength of his crew to fifty men. At Tahiti (about midway between Australia and South America) he shipped Fisk, William Tozer, and some Tahitians. Tozer deposed in Sydney in 1805 that he had been left at Tahiti by the brig *Dart*, Donald MacLennan master, which had cleared from Sydney for the coast of Peru on October 24, 1803. He said nothing of Fisk who appears to have

shipped as second mate of the *Harrington*.<sup>3</sup>

Campbell stated later that American sealers at Mas-afuera had told him that Spain and Portugal were at war and that an English letter of marque ship was cruising off Concepcion (Chile). Campbell then sailed for Coquimbo (about 500 miles north of Concepcion). The story of the raid on Coquimbo is thus told in the Journal of Francis Gardner, chief mate of the *Harrington*:<sup>4</sup>

Wednesday, September 26th, 1804—Light airs and pleasant. Sailed into Coquimbo, long side of a Spanish Brig, fired one gun and ordered them to haul their Colours down and it was done, then boarded them and sent all their Men on Shore—Latter part, at 7 a.m. [*i.e.* on September 27, civil time] hauled her long side and took the Valuable part of the Cargo on board our vessel.

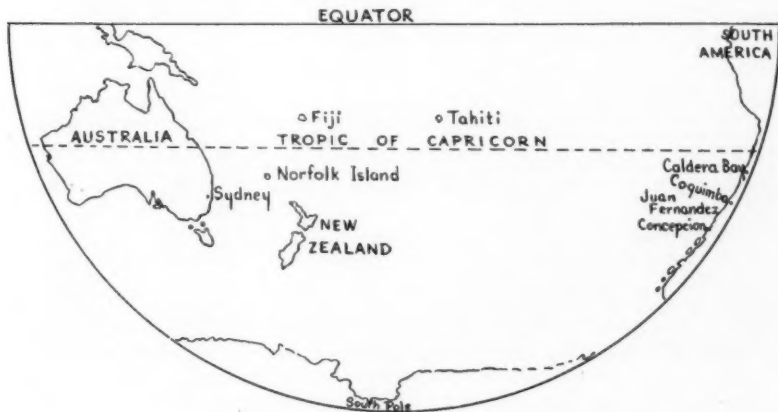
Gardner's Journal also relates how on Monday, October 1, they saw a schooner at anchor in Caldera Bay and stood in for her.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 383-384, Deposition of William Tozer before the magistrates.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 341-342, Campbell's letter to Governor King of March 7, 1805; pp. 376-378, Extracts from Gardner's Log.

They fired a Gun and we fired one, and the Schooner fired two shots at us, which occasioned us to fire a whole broadside at them, which made them leave their Vessel and go on shore—we boarded her after we came in and found her on fire in the Cabin and drifting on Shore, but not much Damage done We put the fire out and got her afloat.

The *Harrington* also carried off some pigs of copper from Guasco (near Coquimbo). A note in the *Harrington's* log, written by Henry James Purcell, states that on September 29 Don Felix had been expected from Coquimbo "to take our cargo for copper," but that at 3 p.m. the Governor (of Guasco) came on board and said that Don Felix was detained at Coquimbo. In 1806 Don Felix went on board the English privateer *Port au Prince* to buy contraband goods but was held to ransom for 4,000 dollars.<sup>5</sup>



The merchant brig taken at Coquimbo was the *San Francisco* and *San Paulo*. The schooner cut out of Caldera Bay was the *Estremina*, a Spanish ship of war commanded by Don Antonio Jose del Campo of the Spanish Navy.

Arnold Fisk was given command of the *San Francisco* and William Tozer of the *Estremina*. They sailed first to Tahiti and then to Norfolk Island (900 miles east of New South Wales). Learning at Norfolk Island that no news had been received of war between Britain

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 340, Log entry regarding Don Felix, story of the visit of Don Felix to the *Port-au-Prince*, Mariner's Tonga.

and Spain, Campbell decided to take the *Harrington* into Sydney for supplies. The prizes were to wait for him further down the Australian Coast and then sail with the *Harrington* to India. The prizes sailed in company from Norfolk Island on February 9, 1805.

Governor King, learning what had happened on the coast of Chile, detained the *Harrington* and sent out vessels to bring in the prizes. The *Lady Nelson* found the *Estremina* in Jervis Bay, 100 miles south of Sydney, and brought her to Port Jackson, arriving on March 14. Writing on April 30, 1805, King says:

By the People on board the *Estremina* I learned that the Brig was lying in Kent Group in a very leaky state, most of her cargo destroyed or damaged, and that it was intended by the Person in Charge of her [Arnold Fisk] to remove from hence to some other Harbour on the Coast.<sup>6</sup>

Reporting to King on May 16, 1805, Acting-Lieutenant Robbins of the Colonial Cutter *Integrity*, wrote:

At 7 a.m. on April 29, off Kent's Group [in Bass Straits between Australia and Tasmania], saw a brig standing to the Northward. At 10 she passed within Hail and proved to be the Francisco, Spanish brig, in charge of Mr. Arnold Frisk [Fisk], 2nd mate of the *Harrington*, and wearing an English Union Jack. I ordered him to come on board which he did. I informed him that as it did not appear that Hostilities had commenced between England and Spain (from the latest information received from Europe) it was his Excellency Governor King's direction she should be brought to Port Jackson. As I did not know what Mr. Frisk's intentions or that of his Crew might be on that head after hovering so long upon this coast and as that Vessel was in a very leaky State I thought it advisable to take charge of her myself, which I did, and hoisted the Spanish Colours in their proper place, taking with me Mr. Kent and five Men of whom three were Marines; I rec'd from Mr. Frisk Captain Campbell's original Orders to him, and sent Mr. Frisk and four of the Crew on board the *Integrity*, keeping on board the Brig 12 men belonging to the *Harrington*, five of whom were Otaheitian. Contrary winds compelled me to put into Port Dalrymple [Tasmania] for Water on the 2nd instant and sailed again the 5th during which time Lieut-Governor Paterson at my request put a Guard on board for the preservation of the Cargo. I arrived between the Heads of this port late this evening when I redelivered the Charge of her to Mr. Frisk.<sup>7</sup>

The log of the New Bedford whaler *Hannah and Eliza* has this note under the date May 15, 1805:—"At 5 a.m. [May 16 civil time]

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 460, Letter of Governor King to William Marsden, Secretary of the British Admiralty.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 479, Report by Robbins.

spoke the *Integrity*, Cutter, with a Spanish prize, bound into Port Jackson."<sup>8</sup>

Tozer deposed on April 9 that after leaving Norfolk Island he took his steering orders from "the person who had charge of the *San Francisco* [Mr. Fisk]." The two prizes sailed together to Kent Group (Bass Straits). Later Tozer took the *Estremina* to Jervis Bay (just south of Sydney) to await further orders from Captain Campbell.



View of the Settlement on Sydney Cove

Courtesy of Mitchell Library, Sydney, N.S.W.

In a despatch dated July 20, 1806, King stated that the *San Francisco* had been run on shore in Port Jackson to prevent her sinking. When despatches dated from London, January 11, 1805, announcing the outbreak of war with Spain reached Sydney the officers and men of H.M.S. *Buffalo* seized the *San Francisco* and the *Estremina* as prizes.<sup>9</sup> The Vice-Admiralty Court (which speaks of the *San Francisco* and *San Paulo*, alias *Amiante*) ordered the two vessels to be sold at auction and the proceeds to be held in trust. This was done.

<sup>8</sup>Nantucket Whaling Museum, *Log of Hannah and Eliza*.

<sup>9</sup>H.R.A., v. 5, p. 741, King to Viscount Castlereagh.

The *Estremina* was bought by the New South Wales Government and did good service as a Colonial vessel.<sup>10</sup>

King had in the meanwhile sent Lieutenant Robbins to Valparaiso in the *Integrity* bearing letters in English and French (as no one in the colony could write Spanish) to Don Luis Munoz de Guzman, Captain General and Governor of Chile and Rear-Admiral in the Spanish Navy, explaining the position and asking that witnesses should be sent to Sydney who could give evidence on the seizing of the two vessels and the removal of the pigs of copper. Unhappily nothing more was ever heard of the *Integrity*.<sup>11</sup>

The *Harrington* was released from detention on September 6, 1806, on orders from London. She cleared for China, under William Campbell, on January 27, 1807, but went first to Fiji (2000 miles east of Australia) to secure a cargo of sandalwood. She returned to Sydney on March 30, 1808, with a valuable cargo of China goods. As trade between Canton and Sydney infringed upon the East India Company's monopoly, the *Harrington* cleared from Canton to Malacca and came from Malacca to Sydney.

The *Harrington* was ready for another voyage when, on the night of May 15, 1808, fifty convicts headed by Robert Stewart, formerly a lieutenant in the British Navy, seized her, cut the cables, and ran out to sea. Campbell was on shore; the mate and the crew of twenty-three were sent ashore in the boats, but not till the *Harrington* was well out of Port Jackson.<sup>12</sup>

In March, 1809, H.M.S. *Dedaigneuse* fell in with the *Harrington* near Manila. Stewart and his men put up a fight, but after a short action the *Harrington* was driven on shore and destroyed. Writing in 1812, Campbell stated that the ringleader (Stewart) and most of the convicts had escaped and were, as he had heard, "then at large in some part of India."<sup>13</sup>

An affidavit tendered by Campbell in May, 1813, to support a claim to be recouped for losses caused by the seizure of the *Harrington* sets out that in a case heard in the Civil Court, Sydney, on September 19, 1810, Campbell produced a receipt signed by Simeon Lord, a

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 742-743, Orders of Vice-Admiralty Court; pp. 742-746, Governor King's warrant for the sale.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 720-722, King's letter to Don Munoz.

<sup>12</sup>H.R.A., v. 6, pp. 534-535, Seizure of *Harrington*, Governor Bligh's letter to Castlereagh.

<sup>13</sup>H.R.A., v. 7, p. 519, Petition of William Campbell.



Sydney merchant, for £2,251 paid for the *Harrington* and all her rigging and equipment. This was dated May 4, 1808, and is witnessed by A. Fisk, "Attorney to James Balfour."

The affidavit, signed by Ellis Bent, Judge-Advocate, further states that in this case Elizabeth Fisk, possibly Arnold Fisk's wife, though from other sources it would appear that Fisk's wife was named Mary, appeared as a witness for Campbell and gave evidence about the seizure of the *Harrington* by Stewart and his gang. Fisk was probably at sea when the case was heard.<sup>14</sup>

On August 26, 1811,<sup>15</sup> Arnold Fisk arrived at Sydney as master of the 158-ton American-built brig *Favourite*. Though registered in Calcutta the *Favourite* was owned by Garnham Blaxcell and Co. Blaxcell, a Sydney merchant, was interested in the Fiji sandalwood trade and had been closely associated with Captain John Macarthur, the man who had deposed Governor William (Bounty) Bligh on January 26, 1808. Bligh stated that Macarthur had been the brains behind the successful voyage of the *Harrington* to China with Fijian sandalwood in 1807-1808.<sup>16</sup>

The *Favourite*, carrying 4 guns and manned by 23 men, came from Canton. Her cargo was returned as follows:

"471 Chests and Boxes of Tea; 38 Packages of Nankin; 2 Cases of Silk, etc; 1 Case of Glass; 7 Boxes Hats; 2 Cases Lac'd [lacquered] Ware; 551 Packages China; 3 Packages Pictures; 3 B's [Boxes] of Shirts; 8 B's Wax Candles; 1 Case Anni Seed [aniseed]." There is little doubt that the *Favourite* had taken a cargo of sandalwood from Fiji to Canton.<sup>17</sup>

On September 27, the *Favourite*, with Fisk in command, cleared for the Derwent River, Tasmania, with "sundry merchandise." She entered at Sydney again on December 10, 1811.

During this visit Arnold Fisk decided to settle in Tasmania. On

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 757-759. Letter of William Campbell to Governor Macquarie, enclosing Bent's affidavit. Bent speaks of the evidence of Elizabeth Fisk, while a work on the Fiske and Fisk family by Frederick Clifton Pearce (Chicago, 1896) says that Arnold Fisk married in New Zealand [this should probably be New South Wales] Mary A. Bunker, daughter of Captain Bunker. This was most certainly Eber Bunker, who went from Nantucket to England in 1786 and first visited Australia in 1791 as master of the London whaler *William and Ann*. Eber Bunker settled near Liverpool, New South Wales, and is buried in the churchyard there.

<sup>15</sup>Historical Records of New South Wales, v. 6, pp. 818-819.

<sup>16</sup>H.R.A., v. 6, p. 535, Bligh to Castlereagh.

<sup>17</sup>H.R.A., v. 8, pp. 433-434.

January 21, 1812, Captain John Murray of the 73rd Regiment sold to Arnold Fisk, master of the Brig *Favourite*, all his right, title and interest in the lease, with 12 years to run, of 3 roods 33 perches of land on the Town Rivulet in Hobart Town with the house and any other building on it. The price was £160 sterling; Murray had bought it in 1811 for £135 and paid for it with government money, which he never repaid. The transfer was signed in the presence of T. W. Birch, no doubt acting for Fisk, who can hardly have been in Tasmania at the time. Arnold Fisk did not retain this house long.<sup>18</sup>

Fisk left Sydney in the *Favourite* in ballast on April 10, 1812, on another voyage to the Fiji Islands for sandalwood and thence to China. Reporting to Governor Macquarie in 1816 on Murray's house, James Meehan, Deputy-Surveyor General, wrote:—

Captain Murray sold the house to Mr. Fisk as his [Murray's] own property and converted the money to his own uses; Mr. Fisk sold it to Mr. Ayers and Mr. Ayers again to Mr. Kent, in whose possession it was when I left the Derwent in August, 1813.<sup>19</sup>

The *Favourite* returned to Sydney on September 10, 1813. This time she entered from Calcutta, and her cargo is given as a mere 70 packages of piece goods and 30 of China ware. It looks as if she had gone to Canton and then had disposed of most of her China cargo at Calcutta. She had been sold, for the owner's name is entered as John MacKenzie.<sup>20</sup>

On October 22, 1813, the *Favourite* cleared for the Society Islands (Tahiti) and China. This time the master's name is not given, but it was not Fisk, since in 1813 Fisk had secured four cows to begin farming in Tasmania.<sup>21</sup>

By February, 1815, he was a well established settler in Tasmania with a farm at the New Plains in the Pittwater district (Tasmania). Then or a little later he had also a house in Hobart Town and played an active part in public affairs.

On March 1, 1815, Arnold Fisk of Pittwater (15 miles from Hobart), yeoman, gave the following information on oath to the Rev. Robert Knopwood and Adolarius W. H. Humphrey, magistrates, at Hobart Town:—

"That yesterday morning I had occasion to come to Hobart Town on

<sup>18</sup>H.R.A., ser. 3, v. 1, p. 507, Lease with Murray's endorsement.

<sup>19</sup>H.R.A., ser. 3, v. 3, p. 579, Meehan's report on sale of lease.

<sup>20</sup>H.R.A., ser. 1, v. 8, p. 193.

<sup>21</sup>H.R.A., ser. 3, v. 3, p. 643, Statement of Assistant-Commissary-General Hull.

business. I left home about 10 o'clock. About 7 o'clock this day My Servant [Richard Clarke] came to Hobart Town, Informed me that my House had been robbed of all my Wearing Apparel, plate and Jewellery and also the Wearing Apparel belonging to Mrs. Fisk and my Children, and that by a banditti with their faces disguised and that they had wantonly destroyed many Articles which they could not take away."<sup>22</sup>

Richard Clarke deposed that at least four men came to the house between 2 and 3 a.m. They rapped at the parlour door, desiring Mr. Fisk to get up. When Clarke asked them what they wanted they said they had a letter for Captain Fisk. The men were well armed and had their faces blacked. Mrs. Fisk was staying with Mrs. Humphrey, who lived not far away.<sup>23</sup>

Corporal Thomas Miller related, on April 20, how he had arrested on April 17, at the Fat Doe River more than 50 miles from Pittwater, a bushranger named William Martin who showed him the places in the Sweetwater Hills near Pittwater where the goods stolen from Fisk's house had been hidden. He produced five bundles.

The first contained these books: Lord Nelson's *Memoirs* (1 vol.); Sterne's *Sermons* (1 vol.); a Bible; *Tom Jones* (2 vols.); Turnbull's *Voyage* (to the Pacific, 1 vol.); *Practical Discourse on Future Judgment* (1 vol.). There were also a black satin waistcoat marked *AF* and a mixed array of clothing and bed furnishings.

Three bundles found in a hollow tree included another black satin waistcoat marked *A. Fisk*; a Chinese velvet, coloured waistcoat marked *A. Fisk*; a white linen waistcoat, not marked; 13 shirts; a lady's tippet; and much other clothing. With the bundles were a brass compass, a spy glass, and sixteen pounds of tea wrapped in a flannel petticoat.<sup>24</sup>

Guided by George Kirby, a young man who asserted that the robbers had threatened to shoot him if he did not take some of the stolen property, Miller found hidden in the bank of a creek at Pittwater a shirt marked *AF, No. 17*, two linen waistcoats, two pairs of nankeen trousers, and a pair of linen pantaloons.<sup>25</sup>

Thomas Smith, a lad who also said that he had the stolen goods forced upon him, produced from a hollow tree two shirts marked *AF*

<sup>22</sup>H.R.A., ser. 3, v. 2, p. 101, Deposition of Arnold Fisk.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 101-102, Information on oath of Richard Clarke.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 102-104, Statement of Thomas Miller.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105, Examination of George Kirby.

35 and AF 37, two linen waistcoats, 3 pairs of pantaloons and a grey cloth jacket.<sup>26</sup>

Arnold Fisk identified as stolen from his house all the articles produced by Miller except one shirt, which he did not recollect, and the tea, which he could not swear to, though it was the kind of tea that he lost.<sup>27</sup>

William Mills Martin stated that the robbery was planned by William Stevens, a convict stockkeeper (in charge of cattle) who used to supply the bushrangers with powder and other things. It was carried out by Stevens himself and three bushrangers, Hugh Burn, Collier, and Richard McGwyre, with Martin to keep watch. The plunder was divided at Stevens's hut; some was given to the lads Kirby and Smith. Stevens had all the silver spoons and some of the jewelry.<sup>28</sup>

Thomas Smith, a lad who was shepherding some sheep belonging to his father and slept in Stevens's hut, related how Stevens said to the bushrangers, as they were drinking rum:—"My Lads, I can tell you how to do a clean thing," and added that he had seen a cart go to Fisk's with plenty of tea and sugar and some spirits. The bushrangers said that they would go with all their hearts, if they lost their lives for it. They blacked their faces with charcoal and water and told Smith and Kirby that they would be back in two or three hours. About that time they came back, all a little drunk. Smith had seen in Stevens's possession rings, necklaces, a cross, a hair chain with gold clasps, and a large piece of money with two heads on one side, three table spoons, one tea spoon, and a silver knife. All these, Stevens had told him, came from Fisk's house.<sup>29</sup>

Arnold Fisk was one of a coroner's jury which sat at Hobart Town (now Hobart) on May 20, 1815, to inquire into the death of James O'Burne, killed in an affray with a gang of bushrangers near New Norfolk (22 miles north of Hobart). The jury found that O'Burne was wilfully murdered by James Whitehead, Peter Septon, Michael Howe, Richard Collyer (or Collier), Richard McGwyre, Hugh Burn, Peter Geary, George Jones, and "a woman Native of this Island who is called Mary."<sup>30</sup>

At a court-martial held in Hobart Town on June 21 Hugh Burn pleaded guilty to murdering, in company with others then still at

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 105-106, Statement of Thomas Smith.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104, Statement of Arnold Fisk.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 104-105, Examination of W. Mills Martin, a Felon.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 122-124, Inquest touching the death of James O'Burne.

large, Charles Carlisle and James O'Burne and also to breaking into the house of Arnold Fisk, yeoman, at New Plains, Pittwater, and stealing 19 spoons, a silver soup ladle, a small azimuth compass, and a spy glass, with divers other articles of great value.

Hugh Burn was sentenced to be hanged, and the sentence was duly carried out.<sup>30</sup>

There seems to have been some difficulty in 1816 over Fisk's convict servant, Richard Clarke (also called Clark). Fisk wrote to Governor Macquarie in Sydney and on April 6, 1816, J. T. Campbell, Macquarie's secretary, sent a note to Macquarie explaining that he could not come over to dinner because he had been answering Fisk's letter and writing to Lieutenant-Governor Davey requesting him to assign (or re-assign) Clarke to Fisk as a convict servant.<sup>31</sup>

In 1819 Arnold Fisk had a watermill on the Rivulet which ran through Hobart Town. It was the only mill in the place except a Government mill. In July, 1819, Fisk complained that the Government mill was grinding corn for private persons, a charge denied by the Superintendent.<sup>32</sup>

Later in 1819 medical aid, food and shelter was given to Tasmanian natives at Fisk's mill. On November 4, 1819, Lieutenant-Governor Sorell ordered Surgeon Luttrell to discontinue these arrangements by the end of the next week. However, on December 31, Sorell instructed Luttrell to continue to rent accommodation for invalids from Fisk for 10 shillings a week but laid it down that the invalids must do without attendance.<sup>33</sup>

On February 23, 1820, Fisk wrote to Assistant Commissary Hull complaining bitterly of the competition of the Government mill. He said that as a result he had been unable to pay the mortgage on his farm at Pittwater:

At the time I built my Mill I had not the most distant Idea that the Government would, instead of assisting and encouraging such an undertaking, build a Mill for the very express purpose of Ruining me, which was Captain Nairn's whole and Soul view when he first proposed that a Government Mill should be built and which has unfortunately now come to pass. My Farm has been this day sold by Public Auction, and

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 119-120, Court-Martial on Hugh Burn and sentence.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 586, J. T. Campbell's letter and enclosure.

<sup>32</sup>H.R.A., ser. 3, v. 3, p. 323, Statement of G. W. Evans on Watermills; H.R.A., v. 2, pp. 708-709, Reply to Fisk's complaint.

<sup>33</sup>H.R.A., v. 2, p. 741, Sorell's letter about natives; p. 754, Instructions regarding invalids.

bought in by a Young Man who wished to serve me but at the present Moment is not able to pay the Money down without some assistance; and if the money is not paid or Security given before Saturday the Farm will be re-sold again on Monday next, which will be a great Misfortune to me as well as a loss to him.

Now, my Dear Sir, you have it in your power to serve me most materially without the least inconvenience to any Soul living; which is to Allow me the indulgence of Putting 500 Bushels of Wheat into His Majesties' Store and only to stop one half of my Government Debt this year and allow me another year to pay the other half. If you will be so kind as to grant me this favour you will confer an everlasting obligation on me and my Family, which we shall never forget; for it will be the means of insuring to me and my Family a Home, for I must also expect that the Mills [Fisk had really two mills on the Hobart rivulet, one above and one below the Government mill] will Shortly be sold under Similar circumstances, and in the Case I shall be turned out of doors with a large Family and no means of Supporting them.<sup>34</sup>

In a report dated February 24, 1820, Hull describes Arnold Fisk as a respectable inhabitant of the town. He says that until the Government mill was built, Fisk ground the flour for the Government stores at 20d a bushel cash. Fisk's charge against Nairn, Hull describes as absurd, as absurd as his assertion that he built the mill to accommodate the public. If the Government had not built the mill it would be paying £600 or £700 a year to Mr. Fisk. The young man who had bought in the farm was Bartholomew Reardon (district constable at Pittwater, known as Black Bart). Reardon was of very doubtful character and in debt to Mr. Edward Lord for more than £2,000. Fisk's farm sold for £500, the money to be paid on Saturday next or the farm resold.

Hull doubted whether Fisk could provide a quarter of the 500 bushels of wheat he offered but Reardon had 180 acres of wheat on his farm. The 500 bushels would be worth £250.

Fisk offered to pay £40 which was half his public debt for four cows received from the Government in 1813. Hull adds:

It is from habits of extravagance, I am informed, that Mr. Fisk is brought to this distress, for he informs me that he now grinds upwards of 120 Bushels a Week. His Farm is a truly valuable one. I have been well informed this day that there are no more trees on it than may serve for ornament and nearly the whole of it lays ready for the plough; adjoining it is a run of 1,000 Acres of Rich Land, unappropriated. I could not with any degree of justice to the many settlers residing on their

<sup>34</sup>H.R.A., v. 3, pp. 643-644, Fisk's letter to Hull.

Farms, or to my own feelings, receive the 500 Bushels of Wheat from Mr. Fisk but to enable him to pay his Government debt I have promised to receive from him an adequate quantity next month.<sup>35</sup>

George W. Evans, Deputy Surveyor General, stated on March 23, 1820, that the Fisk farm was of 500 acres, none of it broken up but rich soil, and that it sold for £450 and was paid for in cash.<sup>36</sup>

In 1818 and again in 1819 Arnold Fisk had been appointed a member of the Lieutenant-Governor's Court, which dealt with civil cases. On September 22, 1820, Fisk's name appears as one of the six holders of Pew No. 4 in St. David's Anglican Church at Hobart Town.<sup>37</sup>

On this quiet and devout note ends the official record of the history of Arnold Fisk, of Rhode Island, Tahiti, and Tasmania.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 642-643, Hull, report to Commissioner Bigge's secretary.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 322, G. W. Evans, statement to Commissioner Bigge.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 522, List of members of Court; p. 681, Allocation of pew.

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## THE PATROL OF NARRAGANSETT BAY (1774-76)

By H. M. S. *Rose*, Captain James Wallace

Extracted and transcribed by WILLIAM G. ROELKER

Written and annotated by CLARKSON A. COLLINS, 3RD

[continued from April, 1949, v. 8, no. 2, p. 63]

WHILE JOHN BROWN at Providence plotted revenge and envisioned Wallace behind the bars of Newport jail, the object of his enmity on board the *Rose* in Newport harbor drew his noose tighter about the throat of Rhode Island's commerce. Vessels laden with provisions were particularly suspect; the pages of the Newport *Mercury* give numerous accounts of their being taken "under the *protection* of the men or war."

In making these seizures Wallace served a double purpose: cutting off supplies from the American army and obtaining much-needed provisions for the British troops and vessels at Boston. The supply problem facing the British commanders was indeed vexing, as is shown by Admiral Graves's report to the Admiralty, written at Boston on May 14, 1775:

The fears of a few well disposed people to risk their Vessels and the determination of the rest to prevent the Army and Navy having Supplies of Provisions and Fuel, has caused most of the Vessels in this province to be dismantled and laid up . . . for under the severe prohibitions of the Rebel Generals few people dare to supply us.



One of the "few" who dared was George Rome, perhaps the most outspoken of the Newport Tories, the man who had been entertaining Wallace when the riot of December, 1774, occurred. His activities in procuring foodstuffs for the British led to the next outbreak of violence on the part of the Sons of Liberty. Two days after the clash, in which fortunately no blood was shed, Wallace recounted the details to his superior.

Rose Rhode Island June 5th 1775.

Sir

On the 3d inst An Insurrection happened here—The People took it in their heads, A Merchant (Mr. Rome) had bought some Provisions for the Use of Government—they stopped the Carts, threw about the Flour, flew to Arms with an avowed intent to destroy the Merchant's House and Stores crying out through the Streets now was the time to kill the Tories—Intelligence was given me of this Transaction—I went on Shore saw the Rebels coming in Shoals, Armed with Musquets, Bayonets, Sticks and Stones &c. Was it possible I could be a Spectator of this—I got a hundred Men and More ashore well appointed. Stopt them in their Career, told them upon the first Act of Hostility We would rush on and put every Man to the Sword, and at the same time order the Ships to fire the Town in every quarter—This together with the prayers and entreaties of Several of their principal Men (who were alarmed at the Prospect) put a Stop to an Affair wherein the lives of hundreds were concerned.

In the beginning of the Fray, one of the most daring of the Rebels, who pressed too close on upon us I seized by the Collar and made Prisoner. Many Gentlemen of the Town begged me to give him up, And if I did they assured me they would disperse and restore peace to the Town. [I] answered them, I came on shore for no other purpose than to keep Peace—and preserve from destruction the King's friends—Could I be assured of that I would turn him out instantly—turned out he was. they soon after retired and dispersed—And we embarked on board after being on shore about four Hours. During which time our people behaved with the greatest good Order. Different Reports says there was from three to Seven hundred Men under Arms besides those with Sticks Stones &ca—while on shore We were joined by Lieut Brenton<sup>1</sup> of the Navy upon half pay here, who I must do the Justice to say Shewed every disposition of a good Officer and Subject, and for which he is obliged to abandon his family and farm, and take shelter on board His Majesty's Ship. The people of the Town having Sworn and attempted his destruction.

[signed] Jas Wallace

<sup>1</sup>Jahleel Brenton, later a British rear-admiral.



Only ten days were to elapse between the writing of Wallace's report on the disturbance in Newport and the occurrence of events even more alarming in character. Throughout the spring the General Assembly had been feverishly engaged in putting the colony on a war footing. Troops had been raised; officers had been commissioned; and steps had been taken to procure an adequate supply of munitions. Early in June it was voted to hire two armed vessels as a colony naval force. This action having been taken, the Assembly felt strong enough to direct Deputy Governor Nicholas Cooke (the elected governor, Joseph Wanton, had been refused permission to take the oath of office) to protest directly to Wallace and demand the release of the vessels he had seized.

East Greenwich, June 14th, 1775.

Sir:

Long have the good people of this colony been oppressed by your conduct, in interrupting their lawful trade, and preventing the importation of the provisions necessary for their subsistence.

The acts of the British Parliament, already filled with restrictions of trade, oppressive in the highest degree, seem by you, to be thought too lenient.

Not controlled by those you affect to call your masters . . . . you have greatly impeded the intercourse between this and the other colonies, as well as between the different parts of this colony. The inhabitants, expecting the interposition of the lawful authority of the colony, have borne these outrages with a patience almost criminal.

The Legislature have heard their complaints, and in consequence of an act passed by the General Assembly this day, I demand of you the reason of your conduct towards the inhabitants of this colony, in stopping and detaining their vessels. And I also demand of you, that you immediately restore the two packets, belonging to some inhabitants of the town of Providence; and all other vessels belonging to the inhabitants, of this colony which you have taken and unjustly detained.

So long as you remain in the colony, and demean yourself as becomes your office, you may depend upon the protection of the laws, and every assistance for promoting the public service, in my power. And you may also be assured that the whole power of this colony will be exerted to secure persons and properties of the inhabitants against every lawless invader. An immediate answer is requested to this letter.

I am, sir, your most humble servant,

NICHOLAS COOKE

To Capt. James Wallace<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>John R. Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island . . .* (Providence, 1856-1865) v. 7, p. 338.

Wallace's reply to "a man who calls himself Lieut. Governor," was curtly military in style.

His Majesty's Ship *Rose*,  
Rhode Island, June 15, 1775.

Sir:

I have received your letter of the 14th inst.; although I am unacquainted with you, or what station you act in; suppose you write in behalf of some body of people; therefore, previous to my giving an answer, I must desire to know *whether or not*, you, or the people on whose behalf you write, are not in open rebellion to your lawful sovereign, and the acts of the British legislature!

I am, sir your most humble and most obedient servant,

JAS. WALLACE

To Nicholas Cooke, Esq.<sup>3</sup>

When the captain of the *Rose* composed his answer to the deputy governor on June 15 he may already have known that his men had come out second best in their first encounter with the infant Rhode Island Navy. On the same day one of his tenders, the sloop *Diana*, which, according to the Newport *Mercury*, was a confiscated colonial vessel, met disaster at the hands of the armed sloops from Providence; and while his attention was diverted, the Patriots of Newport took advantage of the opportunity to strike him from the rear.

Wallace, however, seems not to have been greatly perturbed by these setbacks, for he did not report them to Graves until four days after they occurred.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>There can be little doubt that Wallace's most important source of information concerning the activities and plans of the General Assembly was Metcalf Bowler, Newport merchant, at the time Speaker of the lower house. On May 5, 1775, an anonymous informant wrote a long letter to Wallace, giving details of the debates and votes in the Assembly. (Public Records Office, Admiralty Secretary, In-Letters, April 1774-1775, v. 485, p. 233. Transcripts in the Library of Congress). The writer was in a position to open official correspondence addressed to the governor; he was called to the upper house, more likely in the case of the speaker than of other members of the lower branch; and his letter to Wallace was delivered by the same man who carried Bowler's official correspondence with Governor Wanton (May 3-5, 1775). Jane Clark in "Metcalf Bowler as a British Spy", R. I. H. S. *Collections*, October, 1930, v. 23, p. 101, has shown that in 1778-79 Bowler was carrying on a treasonable correspondence with Sir Henry Clinton.

<sup>5</sup>This report, giving details of the action, running ashore, and capture of the *Diana* on Conanicut Island, is printed in "John Brown's *Katy* . . .", by George L. Miner, *Rhode Island History*, July, 1943, v. 2, p. 76.

Rose, Rhode Island 19th June 1775.

Sir

Since my last, of the 5th Inst I had information<sup>4</sup> of the Colony's fitting out Arm'd Vessels from Providence to attack the King's Ships—Report says a Brig of 18 Carriage Guns, 200 Men, a Sloop of 14—80 Men and four or five other smaller, besides two fitting out at New London, and two at Dartmouth—In consequence of this, I sent the two packets out different ways to reconnoitre; Unluckily One of them fell in with two of their Sloops, and after an Action of half an Hour was run onshore, the particulars of which is inclosed, given me by the Officer who commanded Onboard—<sup>5</sup>At this time I had four or five Vessels loaded with Provisions upon the point of Sailing to Boston, the Owners agreeing with me for their Proceedings—After settling this matter and hearing the Pirates were at Anchor about four Leagues from Us—I got under Weigh as secret as possible, expecting to fall upon them by Surprise—However they got Intelligence and moved higher up towards Providence in shallow Water, where it was not proper for us to pursue them—on our return to Newport we found a great number of the Towns People had taken advantage of our absence, Arm'd a number of Boats and Vessels—taken the Victuallers, carried them to Town, dismantled & unloaded them, and this done in the space of two or three hours—this procedure, together with their behaviour on hearing of an Action in the Massachusetts Bay [Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775]—sending every assistance of Men, Provisions &c to the Rebel Camp, their Public Acts of Assembly all demonstrate they are as much in Rebellion, as Putnam and his Camp—One of the Brigs sent loaded with Rum and Sugar, belongs to a Vernon, as great a Rebel as any in the Country who was upon his March to the Camp, when he heard of the Detention of his Vessel.

Sign'd Jas Wallace

Inclosed are copies of letters that passed between me and a man who calls himself Lieut. Governor.

On June 30 Wallace wrote to Graves again, this time with more favorable news.

Rose, Rhode Island 30th June 1775.

Sir

The Pirate Sloops mentioned in my last of the 19th Inst still keeps up about Providence, they propagate Reports, that they have thirty Whale Boats and seven Sloops ready to come upon Us, When a convenient Opportunity offers, however this Town appears to be divided. Many are jealous of the Providence People, and I am promised an Association acknowledging their Allegiance and binding themselves to support the King's Government, whither they are serious, time will discover ('twas first agitated at a Turtle Feast) if it happens it will make Dissem-

sions among them, and very little additional Force would secure this Port to the King; whereas if the Dregs of the Rebel Army come down among Us, it will be much more difficult. Accounts from the Southward says Governor Tryon is arrived at York. The Continental Congress have appointed four Rebel Generals, Colo Washington, of Virginia Captain General—General Ward at Boston 2d General. Maj Lee 3d—and Major Gates 4th—Washington is now at York on his way for Boston. a Party is set off from Connecticut to take Prisoner Sr John Johnson—while I am writing A Copy of the Association is sent, am told 'twill be augmented to more than three hundred all principal Men, the design of it they assure me is to assist His Majs Government without Equivocation. Hope it will be so, those who *formerly signed* are to be depended upon.

Sign'd James Wallace

The "Association" to which Wallace referred, and which he enclosed in his letter, gives evidence of the unhappy position of the greater part of the substantial mercantile class of Newport. These were the moderate men, harried, as in all revolutions, by the extremists of both sides. Their paramount aim was to maintain public order, and they banded together in order to prevent the destruction, either by British gunfire or mob violence, of the town to which they had contributed so much.

Whereas the unhappy Differences between Great Britain and her Colonies are become of a very serious and alarming Nature, And where-the Peace & good Order of every Community may have a happy tendency to bring about a Reconciliation; And convinced of the Necessity of preventing Anarchy and Confusion which attend a Dissolution of the Powers of Civil Government, We the Subscribers acknowledging our Allegiance to his Majesty,—Do associate under the Ties of Honor to Exert ourselves in the Support of the Civil Authority, and in keeping the Peace of the Town until a Reconciliation between Great Britain and her Colonies can be obtained; And that we will on every case of Emergency Assemble on the shortest Notice to restore Peace and Unanimity, and Preserve the Persons & property of every Individual from Insult & Violence.

Caleb Gardner  
Samuel Fowler  
Francis Malbone  
Wm. Ellery  
Josph Anthony  
Wm Gyles  
Wm Vernon  
John Mawdsley  
Saml Goldthwaite

John Beth [?]  
Geo Champlin  
Wm Minturn  
Geo Gibbs  
Josph Belcher  
Evan Malbone  
James Cahoon  
Saml Yeats  
Samuel Sweet

Chrisr Champlin  
Nathan Bull [?]  
John Bours  
Wm Robinson  
Robt Stevens  
John Read  
John Warren  
James Carpenter  
John Slocum

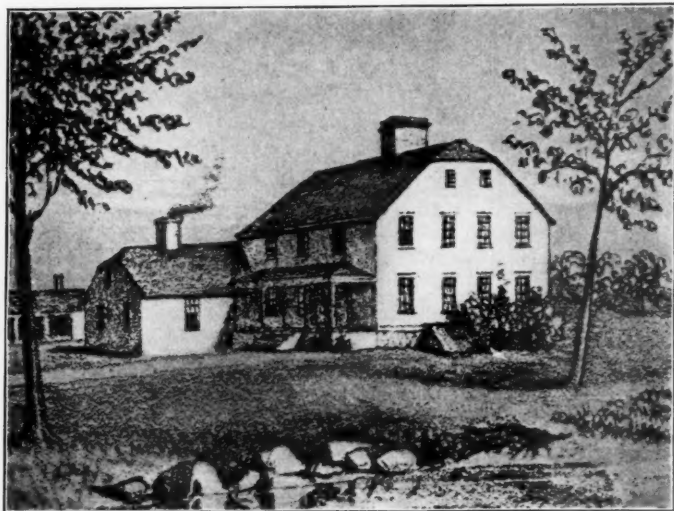
Jonathan Thurston	Thos Richardson	Robt Elliott
Chas Wickham Junr	Peter Cozzens	Elisha Anthony
Simon Pease	Phillip Moss	Joseph Durfee
Solomon Malbone	Wm Read	Joseph Scott
John Malbone Junr	Jonas Langfd Redwood	Charles Cozzens
Chas Wickham	V. Wightman	Jno Freebody
Wm Tweedy	Saml Freebody	John Malbone
Wm Wanton	Jacob Rodr Revira	Wm Burroughs Junr
John Oldfield	Aaron Lopez	John Andrews
Joseph G Wanton	George Hazard	James Rodman
Jerh Clark	Robert Stoddard	Saml Whitecross
Walter Clark	Shearman Clark	Nathaniel Smith
John Townsend	Wm Coddington	Robt Stevens Junr
Ebenezer Richardson	Chas Handy	Gidn Sisson
Wm Burroughs	J. Honeyman	Gideon Wanton
Jos Stevens	Joseph Wanton Junr	

In this list can be found the names of nearly all of Newport's leading citizens: the merchants, shipmasters, and prosperous shopkeepers. Unlike the men who signed the memorial of May 1, 1775, who with the exception of Jahleel Brenton were Englishmen or Scots, the great majority of them had several generations of Americans behind them. They and their forebears had made Newport into the thriving commercial town of the pre-Revolutionary era. Though cultural and mercantile ties bound them to Britain, only a few, as did Joseph Wanton, Jr., sided with the Crown when the ultimate break came. Almost all, though no sympathisers with mobs, in the end remained loyal to the town and colony which they had served before the war and continued to serve after the return of peace.

[to be continued]

#### IN MEMORIAM

Rhode Island Historical Society announces with regret the death of its oldest member, Major William Ely, on May 30, 1949. Mr. Ely was a member of the Society for seventy-three years, having become a life member on January 18, 1876, when his grandfather, Zachariah Allen, was vice-president.



Halftone in R. I. H. S. Library

Richard Smith Block House, Cocumscussoc

This view of the Richard Smith Block House, from the northwest, is taken from a drawing by Edwin Whitefield published in his book, *The Houses of our Forefathers . . . in Rhode Island and Connecticut*. (Boston, 1882). Except for the chopped-off gable ends the house appears substantially as it did ca.1740 after being enlarged by Daniel Updike. In more recent years the wing at the left has been extended; the roof dormers have been added; and a piazza has been built along the south front.

## WHY RHODE ISLAND OPPOSED THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION

by HILLMAN METCALF BISHOP

### PAPER MONEY AND THE CONSTITUTION

[continued from April, 1949, v. 8, no. 2, p. 44]

ALMOST ALL of the standard American histories of the Constitution give only brief attention to Rhode Island's role in the formation of the Union. Without drawing any positive conclusions as to the principal reasons for Rhode Island's long delay in ratifying the Constitution three facts are invariably emphasized. These are: (1) The Federal Constitution forbade the states to emit bills of credit or make anything but gold and silver a tender in payment of debts.<sup>44</sup> (2) In no other state of the Union was the rage for paper money and the opposition to the Constitution so strong. (3) The division within the state over the Constitution coincided with that over paper money. Stated in this way, the implication seems to be inescapable that the Constitutional prohibition of paper money was the primary reason for this state's hostility to the new Federal Union.

Rhode Island writers have rejected this interpretation and have tried to establish a case for a more pleasing explanation of this state's conduct. Speaking at the Centennial celebration of the Rhode Island adoption of the Constitution in 1890 Horatio Rogers, then president of the Rhode Island Historical Society, claimed that an attachment to state sovereignty and the absence of a bill of rights were the principal reasons for the attitude of this state. Judge Rogers concludes that in view of the opposition to the Constitution in other states of leading opponents of paper money like Richard Henry Lee and George Mason "it is idle to impute to paper money the cause of the hostility."<sup>45</sup> Frank G. Bates in his *Rhode Island and the Formation of the Union* agrees with Rogers in emphasizing the attachment to liberty, individualism, democracy, and state's rights as the principal forces which inspired the action of this state.<sup>46</sup> In a later section we shall

<sup>44</sup>Article I, Section 10.

<sup>45</sup>Horatio Rogers, . . . *Rhode Island's Adoption of the Federal Constitution* . . . (Providence, 1890) p. 25.

<sup>46</sup>Frank G. Bates, *Rhode Island and the Formation of the Union* (New York, 1898) pp. 73, 74, 105, 208-212.



consider the political or ideological causes of Rhode Island's position, but first let us examine the economic causes of the state's opposition to the Constitution.

Historians rely primarily on private papers to throw light on the underlying motives of political movements. Unfortunately no private letters from the Rhode Island opponents of the Constitution, explaining their action are available. Nearly all of the Anti-Federalists were men of little formal education and evidently had not acquired the habit of extensive correspondence, or perhaps they were not considered prominent enough individuals to have had their letters preserved for posterity. Such letters as are available are chiefly official communications with the President or Congress. Naturally in such public documents the authors try to explain their own actions in the most favorable manner.

Another important source of information is the contemporary press. During the two and a half years between the adjournment of the Philadelphia Convention and the final action of the Rhode Island Convention, the merits of the Constitution were thoroughly debated in the state. However, most of the attacks on the Constitution in the local newspapers were simply culled from the press of other states. Few of the Rhode Island Anti-Federalists had the literary skill or journalistic ability to make the most of their position. Later on we shall quote from the most important original article against the Constitution to appear in Rhode Island newspapers.

On the other hand, there is a wealth of contemporary material presenting the Federalist side of the controversy. Since the aristocracy of wealth and talent in the state supported the Constitution, they had the experience and ability to write able articles for the local press. Also as a result of the extensive correspondence carried on by leading Rhode Island Federalists with friends and merchants in other states, we have many letters explaining the reasons why the Federalists supported the Constitution.<sup>47</sup>

In private letters and newspaper articles the Rhode Island Federalists continually asserted that an attachment to paper money was the fundamental reason for the state's reluctance to accept the new form of government. Some champions of the Constitution went so

<sup>47</sup>The most informative letters are the Brown Papers in the John Carter Brown Library and the correspondence of William Ellery with Benjamin Huntington in the R. I. State Archives.



far as to claim that a desire to defraud creditors was the "only real objection to the New Constitution."<sup>48</sup> This view was widely shared outside the state. The letters of Washington, Hamilton, Madison, and others show that the Founding Fathers were convinced that Rhode Island's obstructionism was the result of the basest and most dishonest motives. The opinions of Washington and others outside the state were greatly influenced by the letters from friends in Rhode Island whom they knew and trusted. Therefore the opinions of the leading public figures outside the state are entitled to only the same weight that we would give to similar expressions of opinion by Rhode Island Federalists.

Mention should be made, for whatever it is worth, of the fact that in the numerous local attacks on the Constitution none of the articles urged defeat of the Constitution on the specific ground that it would put a stop to paper money. On the other hand, frequent assertions that the Constitution was a trap or plot to benefit the rich and "well born few" might have been intended to infer this.

Some of the Federalists believed that the substantial alteration of the state's legal tender law in September, 1789, would remove the chief obstacle to the ratification of the Constitution.<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that the substantial modification of the legal tender features of the state paper money system had little effect on the attitude of the majority toward the Constitution. The debates in the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention throw little light on the influence of paper money, for neither side made any mention of the subject.<sup>50</sup> This failure to discuss the topic may have been a result of the alteration of the state legal tender law. In the Convention the Federalists used all their tact and diplomacy to win over to their side sufficient votes to gain a majority, and hence may have considered it expedient to avoid mention of this explosive subject. In the Convention more

<sup>48</sup>"Plain Talk" in (Providence) *U. S. Chronicle*, November 29, 1787. See also *Newport Herald*, November 8 and 15, 1787; April 9, 1788; (Providence) *U. S. Chronicle* April 10, 1788 and May 28, 1789. For similar statements in letters see James M. Varnum to General Washington, June 18, 1787, Max Farrand, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven, 1927) v. 3, p. 47; also William Ellery to William Duer, May 21, 1789, Duer Papers, New York Historical Society and William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, March 10, and June 15, 1789.

<sup>49</sup>William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, March 10, 1789.

<sup>50</sup>*Theodore Foster's Minutes of the Convention Held at South Kingston, Rhode Island, in March 1790, Which Failed to Adopt the Constitution of the United States* (Providence, 1929).

time was given to slavery and the slave trade than to any other provisions of the Constitution. The lack of power in Congress to control slavery and the protection given the slave trade by the Constitution resulted in severe animadversions from the Anti-Federalists, points objected to by at least one supporter of the Constitution. Among the amendments proposed by the Rhode Island Convention was one which would have prevented the importation of slaves into the United States "as soon as may be." Here we have an example of the inconsistency of both sides on the issue of states rights. As was pointed out by Benjamin Bourn, those who wished to give Congress complete and immediate control of slavery and the slave trade were also attacking the Constitution on the ground that it would destroy the sovereignty of the states.<sup>51</sup> At the same time the champions of strong central government appealed to the state right's argument to justify the Constitutional compromise over slavery.

However much we deplore the Constitutional provisions respecting slavery and the slave trade, Congress under the Articles of Confederation could not have prohibited the traffic in slaves even after 1808. The heated debate in the Rhode Island Convention over slavery and the slave trade gave the Anti-Federalists an opportunity to shine as the champions of justice and morality and tended to put the advocates of the Constitution on the defensive. Both sides in the bitter party battles of the period were inclined to assume that their own actions were dictated by purity and patriotism while their opponents were motivated by purely selfish and ignoble considerations. Hence we must critically evaluate letters, newspaper articles, and other statements emanating from either side in the conflict.

Fortunately another method of measuring the influence of paper money on the Constitution is available. Congress had recommended to the respective state legislatures that conventions should be called to consider the new Constitution. In spite of this request, the Rhode Island legislature in February, 1788, defeated by a vote of 43 to 15 a motion to call a convention, and instead referred the Constitution directly to the freemen in special town meetings called for that purpose. The submission of the Constitution to what was in effect a popular referendum was quite consistent with the conception of democracy held by the dominant party within the state. We have

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

today not only the total vote for and against the Constitution in each town, but also a record of how each individual freemen cast his vote on this issue in all but four of the thirty towns.<sup>52</sup> This tabulation makes it possible to compare the vote on the Constitution with several votes on paper money and related issues.

In this popular referendum the Rhode Island freemen cast 2,708 votes against the Constitution and only 237 votes for its adoption. The Federalists, especially in Newport and Providence, tried to discredit the proceedings by boycotting the referendum. These tactics were adopted because the supporters of the Constitution knew that they were certain to be overwhelmingly defeated in any popular vote on this issue. The significance of the 2,708 votes against the Constitution can best be understood by comparing this vote with that cast by the Country or "paper money" party in two previous elections.

As previously mentioned, in the election of 1786 the paper money partisans claimed that their party received "the greatest majority ever before obtained in this State."<sup>53</sup> The actual vote is available for only nine towns. Two of these towns are Providence and Newport where a comparison of the 1786 vote with that on the Constitution in 1788 would be meaningless, since both sides largely abstained from the vote on the Constitution. In the other seven towns, Governor Collins who ran considerably ahead of the remaining candidates on the "Landholders Prox" or the Country Party ticket received 702 votes while Governor Greene, who was defeated for reelection, had only 102 votes. In the same towns two years later 756 votes were cast against the Constitution and only 25 for its ratification.<sup>54</sup>

The following year, 1787, the Country Party scored an even bigger victory, and this is the only election during the period we are studying for which we have the actual vote of the state as a whole. In 1787 Governor Collins, who again polled a larger majority than any of the other candidates on his "prox," had 2969 votes while 1141 voted for the hard money candidate, William Bradford.<sup>55</sup> For the reason indicated above we shall deduct the vote in Providence and Newport

<sup>52</sup>The names of those voting yea and nay are missing for Bristol, Foster, Coventry, and Hopkinton. The names of the yeas and nays for all the other towns except Barrington and Richmond are in the Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution of the United States in the R. I. State Archives and are printed in Staples, *op. cit.* p. 591-606. The Yeas and Nays for Barrington and Richmond are in their respective Town Meeting Records.

<sup>53</sup>Footnote 37.

from the totals of both the election of 1787 and the referendum on the Constitution. We find that in the remaining 28 towns the popular vote against the Constitution in 1788 was 95% of the previous year's vote for Governor Collins and 99% of the vote received by the winning Deputy Governor on the "paper money" ticket and actually exceeded the vote cast for the majority of the Country Party candidates for the 19 offices filled in the state-wide election.

Experience shows that popular votes in referenda are usually considerably below that cast in general elections, and there are plenty of indications in the Rhode Island town meeting records that a much smaller number of freemen usually attend special town meetings than vote in annual elections. There is no question but that the same towns and the same individuals who favored the paper money also opposed the Constitution.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the above comparison seems to indicate that the sentiment against the Constitution was noticeably greater than the normal strength of the Country Party.

The same town meetings which expressed their judgment on the Constitution also considered a petition from the Society of Friends to repeal the two most objectionable features of the state paper money system. Motivated by an intention to force the settlement of all debts in depreciated paper money, the legislature had shortened the statute of limitations to two years on suits upon notes and book accounts. The town meetings, which overwhelmingly defeated the Constitution, approved by a large majority the petition of the Quakers for a repeal of this limitation on suits for the settlement of debts. As previously stated, it is a mistake to think of the Country Party as completely united on all important features of the paper emission

<sup>56</sup>The votes in the elections of 1786 in the seven towns referred to above and in four towns for which we have the 1787 vote compared with the votes on the Constitution in 1788 is as follows:

Towns	Votes on Constitution		Election of 1786		Election of 1787	
	Nay	Aye	Collins	Greene	Collins	Greene
Barrington	34	9	33	7	43	16
Coventry	180	0	148	44	187	21
Foster	177	0	178	7	173	1
North Kingstown	160	2	121	26		
Portsmouth	60	12	86	5		
West Greenwich	145	2	136	13		
Warren	41	2			45	41
Totals	797	27	702	102	448	79

The Portsmouth vote is in the R. I. State Archives; the others are in the respective Town Meeting Records.

system. The vote to return to the old statute of limitations on suits for debts was a defeat for the extremists in the Country Party, who were in effect trying to liquidate all debts at a small fraction of the obligation. Another issue which created a division within the Country Party was the much criticized feature of the Emission Act which made paper money legal tender at face value for all engagements previously entered into in gold and silver, even where the creditor had not brought suit or attempted to foreclose a mortgage. Many members of the Country Party favored paper money as a means to ease taxation and pay off the state debt without approving paper money as a tender in all private debts. The Quakers had also petitioned for a revision of the law in such a way as to make the bills of credit legal tender only in case of a foreclosure for mortgage or suit for debt. Although this part of the petition of the Society of Friends was defeated by a substantial majority in the same town meetings which defeated the Constitution, the vote to continue paper money a legal tender for all debts was distinctly smaller than the vote against the Constitution. Of the five towns where the Town Meeting Records permit a comparison between the two votes, the majority against a revision of the legal tender act was greater than the majority against the Constitution in only one town, West Greenwich. This town which had voted 145 to 2 against the Constitution is recorded as unanimously against any change in the paper money law. On the other hand, Warren and Middletown, which voted against the Constitution, were for the modification of the legal tender features of the Emission Act. Little Compton, which supported the Constitution by the small margin of 63 to 57, voted unanimously to repeal the tender act. Warwick, which had stood 140 to 3 against the Constitution, supported the legal tender act by 98 to 24.

Naturally, few creditors were willing to accept depreciated bills of credit at face value in payment of a debt contracted in gold or silver. Therefore, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the debtor—in order to take advantage of the legal tender provisions of the law—was forced to take the money to a judge, who then had legal notices

<sup>88</sup> (Providence) *U. S. Chronicle*, May 10, 1787.

<sup>89</sup> The one exception seems to be Governor Collins, the titular leader of the Country Party until his vote in the Upper House of the General Assembly gave a majority to the motion to call the Rhode Island Convention. The Governor in Rhode Island had little power, and Collins was not a forceful leader.

of the tender of paper money printed in the press. A study of the legal notices in the newspapers gives us the names of the debtors who took advantage of this provision of the law. A comparison of the legal notices with the votes on the Constitution gives an opportunity to test the Federalist assertion that a desire to defraud creditors was the principal reason why Rhode Island opposed the Constitution. In 26 of the 30 towns we have the names of 2236 freemen who registered their opposition to the Constitution. A comparison of the legal notices in the press with the yeas and nays on the Constitution in the above towns shows that *only 70 or approximately 3% of the 2236 freemen voting against the Constitution had discharged even one debt in paper money while 21 or 1% of the opponents of the Constitution were victims of the same paper money tenders.*<sup>57</sup>

One final comparison is possible, and that is to find out how many members of the Rhode Island Convention and the Rhode Island Legislature who opposed the Constitution had personally tended bills of credit in payment of debts. The fact that several members of the Legislature had done this was mentioned several times by the Federalists in the press. Although the Lower House of the Rhode Island General Assembly seven times voted down motions to call a convention to consider the Constitution, in only one instance is there a published roll-call vote. This vote was taken in March, 1789, when the new government had already started to function. The issue now was whether or not Rhode Island should remain out of the Union. Nevertheless, in March, 1789, the Lower House voted 37 to 19 against calling a convention.<sup>58</sup> Among the 37 members of the Lower House recorded as voting in the negative, there were 3 who had settled a debt in paper money. A year later among the 32 delegates to the Rhode Island Convention who held out to the bitter end against the Constitution, there was only one who had taken advantage of the legal tender law to settle a debt.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>It seems surprising that the debtors who tended paper money to their creditors cast their votes for and against the Constitution in almost the same ratio as the rest of the voters in 26 towns for which we have the names of those who voted for and against the Constitution. However, the number (5) voting for the Constitution is so small that it would be dangerous to draw any conclusions on the basis of so few votes.

<sup>58</sup>(Providence) *U. S. Chronicle*, March 19, 1789.

<sup>59</sup>The roll call vote in the Rhode Island Convention on the ratification of the Constitution is in Staples, *op. cit.* p. 672.

In comparing the vote of the Country Party with the vote on the Constitution we should remember that this party had other objectives in addition to a desire to improve the position of the debtor class. The strong support given to this party by the country towns was caused primarily by the large state debt and the crushing burden of direct taxes levied to meet the Continental requisitions. Since the public securities were being sold at a small fraction of their original value, the great majority of voters, all taxpayers, were opposed to payment of interest or principal at face value. By forcing the owner of the state securities to accept depreciated bills of credit or forfeit his securities the state debt was largely repudiated and the burden of taxation was reduced. There are indications that after the new Federal Government started to function, the chief economic argument against the Constitution was the high taxes which were expected to be levied on land and polls to pay the public debt and the high salaries of the Federal officials. In other words, unprecedented taxes on land and polls were to a considerable extent responsible for paper money, and the fear of similar taxes was to a large extent responsible for Rhode Island's opposition to the Constitution.

In January, 1790, when the election of delegates to the Rhode Island Convention was held, the big issue in the press was the funding of the national debt. Hamilton's *First Report on the Public Credit* had appeared, and the debates in Congress on the financing of the Continental debt and the proposed assumption of the state debt received major attention in the press.<sup>60</sup> The establishment of the new Federal Government with what appeared to the taxpayers as exorbitant salaries also provided the opposition with a new ammunition against the Constitution.<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that in Rhode Island public salaries had always been very low and in many cases nonexistent. In the months immediately preceding the final action of the Rhode Island Convention a number of articles on the propriety of land and poll taxes appeared in the press. In several of these articles the Federalists tried to answer the "inflammatory Publications" against

<sup>60</sup> (Providence) The *U. S. Chronicle* of February 11, 1790 carries an advertisement stating that the printer of the *Chronicle* has copies of Hamilton's Report for sale. Before this date it had been summarized in the press.

<sup>61</sup> *Newport Mercury*, September 16, and December 2, 1789; and *Providence Gazette*, August 15, 22, October 17, and December 12, 1789; *Newport Herald*, November 19, 1789; (Providence) *U. S. Chronicle*, October 15, 1789, January 14 and February 18, 1790.



the Federal Salaries and defended the justice of land and poll taxes.<sup>62</sup>

Writing to George Washington only a month before the Rhode Island Legislature finally called the Convention to act on the Constitution, Jabez Bowen—a leading Federalist and former Deputy Governor of the state—explained the opposition to the Constitution as follows:

The Towns of Newport Providence Bristol etc. with the whole Mercantile interest in the other Towns in the State are Federal. while the Farmers in general are against it. Their opposition arises principally from there being much in Debt, from the Insinuations of wicked and designing Men that they will loose their Liberty in adopting it; that the Sallerys of the National Officers are so very high that it will take the whole of the Money Collected by the Impost to pay them, that the Intrest & principle of the General Debt must be raised by Dry Taxation on Real Estates, etc. . . .<sup>63</sup>

Unlike the issue of paper money, which was ignored in the Rhode Island Convention, the question of direct taxes on land and polls received considerable attention. This is shown by the debates and also by the Amendments to the Constitution proposed by the Convention.<sup>64</sup> The Seventh Amendment states: "That no capitation or poll tax shall ever be laid by Congress." The Eighth Amendment proposes that in case of direct taxes Congress shall first make requisitions on the states, who will be free to raise the sums "in such way and manner as the legislatures of the several states shall judge best;" and only if the state does not pay its proportion shall Congress directly assess and collect the tax to cover the requisition. The former Amendment had been originally suggested by the New York Convention and the latter in essence had been adopted by six of the other state Conventions. Evidently the Rhode Island Convention did not consider the above Amendments sufficient, for among four Amendments proposed only by Rhode Island we find the following: "That Congress shall lay no direct taxes, without the assent of the legislatures of the three-fourths of the states in the Union."

Summarizing the economic reasons for Rhode Island's reluctance

<sup>62</sup>Providence Gazette, October 17, 1789 and Newport Mercury July 1, 1789. See also "Observer X" and "XI" reprinted from the *American Mercury* in the Providence Gazette of January 16 and February 1, 1790.

<sup>63</sup>Jabez Brown to George Washington, December 15, 1789. *Documentary History of the Constitution*, v. 5, p. 226.

<sup>64</sup>The complete Amendments and Bill of Rights proposed by the Rhode Island Convention are in Staples, *op. cit.* pp. 674-680.



to adopt the Constitution, it would appear that a fear of heavy taxes on land and polls probably influenced more voters than any other single economic factor. Since there were many different features of the state paper money system on which the great majority of the Rhode Island voters ranged from strong support to strong opposition, one must consider the effect of each feature on the Constitution separately.

1. It is clear that a major reason for the Rhode Island hostility to the Constitution was a fear of heavy direct taxes on land and polls. Through the payment of the state securities in depreciated paper money the burden of taxation on the Rhode Island freemen had been considerably lightened. This was the primary reason for the paper money emission, and in this sense paper money had an important influence on the Constitution.

2. The fear of paper money tenders led a majority of creditors to avoid the foreclosure of mortgages and suits to collect debts. Many debtors undoubtedly wished to continue what was in effect a moratorium on debts. This situation was largely changed nine months before Rhode Island finally adopted the Constitution. Even after the substantial modification of the legal tender law the great majority of the Rhode Island voters continued to oppose the Constitution. This opposition would seem to indicate that the desire of the voters to continue a moratorium on debts was not a decisive factor in explaining the long delay before Rhode Island ratified the Constitution.

3. Since only 3% of those who voted against the Constitution in Rhode Island had taken advantage of the legal tender features of the law to force paper money on their creditors, it would seem that a desire to defraud their creditors could have influenced only an insignificant minority of Rhode Island freemen.

[to be concluded]

## NEWS-NOTES

The April issue of *The American Neptune* contains an article entitled "Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia," by Richard LeBaron Bowen, Jr., Ph.D., a member of the Rhode Island Historical Society. The dhow is the lateen-rigged sailing craft used by the Arabs in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf.

The article gives a comprehensive story of how the Arabs sail their dhows and is probably one of the few accounts of the sailing habits of this native group. Dr. Bowen suggests that the lateen rig may have been introduced into the Mediterranean Sea by the Moslems in the seventh century of the Christian era. After its introduction into the Mediterranean the lateen sail was the dominant rig for over a thousand years and is common to this day. The early Pisans and Venetians adopted the rig for their fighting galleys, many of which sailed against the Moslems in the Crusades. Dr. Bowen also introduces a new theory that the Persians originally developed the lateen rig in the Persian Gulf, where the Moslems first discovered and assimilated it, later to spread it through their domain as a part of their own culture.

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The Society has aided museums by lending from its collections items to be displayed in exhibitions. The oil painting by Michele Felice Corne, Bombardment of Tripoli in 1804, was at The Art Institute of Chicago from April 21 through June 19 in an exhibition of American painting, silver, and architecture from 1650 to the War of 1812, known as "From Colony to Nation." A number of historic articles were lent to Rhode Island State College for a display in connection with the observance of Rhode Island's Independence Day.

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The Newcomen Society of North America honored Brown and Sharpe Manufacturing Company and its president, Henry Dexter Sharpe, at a dinner meeting at the Squantum Club on May 4. Mr. Sharpe, former president of the Rhode Island Historical Society, recounted many of the events of his association with this internationally known concern for fifty-five years.

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Mr. Roelker, director of the Society, has had a number of speaking engagements during the spring: Business and Professional Women at Grace Church, Brown University Chapel, Rotary Club, Mt. Vernon Lodge, no. 4, F. & A.M., and Gaspee Chapter, D. A. R. Mr. Monahan, Librarian, has spoken to the North Providence Lions Club, Bristol Historical Society, and at Kingston, Massachusetts.

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A number of meetings in addition to the lectures of the Society and the stated meetings of the Roger Williams Family Association and the Society of Mayflower Descendants have been held at John Brown House. These include the Shakespeare Head Association, January 13; League of Women Voters, January 18 and May 20; Smith College Club, January 20; Providence County Garden Club, February 10 and March 10; Sons of the American Revolution, February 22; American Association of University Women, March 14; Society of Colonial Dames, March 17; Narragansett Archeological Society, March 30; Girl Scout Council and Leaders, April 8; Block Island Historical Society, April 24; Pottery and Porcelain Club, April 27 and May 25; New London-Providence Doll and Toy Collectors Club, May 14; Antiques Club, May 18; and Cocumscussoc Associates, June 15.

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The Preservation Society of Newport County in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce is offering to summer visitors to Newport the opportunity to visit six private and public buildings, representing Newport's rich architectural heritage. Special exhibits are in the following buildings: Wanton Lyman Hazard House, Old Colony House, Trinity Church, Whitehall, Touro Synagogue, Hunter House, the Breakers, and the Breakers stables. Although single admissions may be purchased to each house, a special combination ticket will be available (adults: \$2.50, including tax; children: \$1.00). Those interested in securing more detailed information may obtain a circular of information at John Brown House.

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The Cocumscussoc Association has recently taken final title to the historic Richard Smith Block House near Wickford. Meeting on May 19, the trustees of the Association voted to return to the older spelling, *Cocumscussoc*, a form closer to that employed by Roger Williams and Richard Smith and the one used by the Updike family, who owned the estate throughout the great period of the Narragansett Planters.

C. P. M.

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEW MEMBERS

March 1, 1949 — May 31, 1949

Mr. Thomas A. Buffum Newport, R. I.	Mr. Bernard J. O'Neill
Mr. Edward L. Clifford	Mr. V. George Rustigian
Miss Helena Hope Gammell East Greenwich, R. I.	Mrs. Ernest F. Salisbury
Mr. Robert Hale Ives Gammell Boston, Mass.	Mr. William P. Sheffield Newport, R. I.
Miss Margaret F. Jacques Pawtucket, R. I.	Dr. William B. Shepard
Mrs. Lawrence Lanpher	Mr. Robert Moody Sherman
Mrs. C. Gordon MacLeod	Miss Ruth E. Slade
Mr. Lewis S. Milner	Mr. Carl Van Doren New York, N. Y.
Mr. William Myers, Jr.	Mr. Edward Winsor

## LIBRARY HOURS

Mon. through Fri. . . . 9:00 to 5:00  
Tuesday evening . . . . 7:00 to 9:00  
Sunday afternoon . . . . 3:00 to 5:00

## ACCESSIONS

From Bradford F. Swan, *Edgerton genealogy, 1762-1927*, compiled by Jesse Edgerton.

From Miss Eliza F. W. Taft, *The name and family of Taft*, compiled by the Media Research Bureau, Washington, D. C. (typed).

By purchase, *Yorkshire pedigrees*, Pt. 3 (T-Z) Harleian Society publication.

From Mrs. Ruth S. D. Eddy, *Mary Warren Tufts*, by James Hayden Tufts.

By exchange, *Winthrop papers*, v. 5, 1645-1649.

By purchase, *Borden genealogy* (microfilm)

Gift of R. R. Potter, Three pieces of Indian pottery, taken from the ground on Barrington Parkway at Interlochen Road.

Gift of Paul C. Nicholson, Letter book of the Providence Washington Insurance Company, July, 1815-Dec., 1830.

From Bradford F. Swan, *The life of Judah Touro*, by Leon Huhner.

Gift of the author, *The Perkins family*, by Dr. Victor J. Andrew, Mss.

From W. G. Roelker, *The line of John Gooch in New England*.

From J. R. Cushman, Blanket from the Harris family; ms. orders issued to Capt. James Williams by Col. Sanford Branch of 2nd Reg. of Militia, 9/18/1810.

